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AMGT, NZ
SUBJECT: New Zealand H1N1 Sitrep, June 19, 2009

11. (SBU) Summary. On June 18, the New Zealand Government announced a shift of its H1N1 strategy from one of "containment" to one of "management" of the virus. This move was prompted by increased volumes of confirmed and suspected cases of the virus received by the country's regional health authorities. One key change in strategy is the new restriction placed on the public distribution of Tamiflu, - now being supplied to those patients with the most severe H1N1 symptoms. Existing virus-related border controls and quarantines will remain in place. The GNZ does not envision issuing any new travel advisories considering the breadth of the pandemic, although it is concerned about possible subsequent Pacific Island cases of H1N1. The GNZ's new strategy indicates that it recognizes it is no longer able to contain the spread of H1N1 and that public distribution of its Tamiflu stocks must be tightly control. End Summary.

GNZ's Shifts from Containing to Managing H1N1

12. (U) On June 18, the regional public health authorities in Wellington and Christchurch upgraded their strategy to deal with the H1N1 virus. Planning is now under way to shift the role of public health authorities from 'containment' of the virus to 'management' of the pandemic. Auckland's regional public health authority is expected to make the shift on June 22. The GNZ states that virus-related border controls and quarantines will remain in force. We anticipate the GNZ will publish its new "management" plan some time next week.

Tamiflu Distribution under Tighter Control

13. (U) Central to the strategic shift is the restriction now placed on the public distribution of the anti-viral drug, Tamiflu. The Wellington and Christchurch regions, which include NZ's capitol city of Wellington and the largest city on the South Island respectively, will be the country's first regions to restrict the drug by public health services. Wellington's Dominion Post newspaper reported that only patients within the Wellington region

who exhibit serious H1N1 symptoms, or those with additional health issues, will now be provided with the drug.

14. (SBU) The move from a strategy of virus containment to management is an acknowledgement by the GNZ that it is unable to contain spread of the H1N1 throughout the country and that its efforts to ensure a continuing adequate supply of Tamiflu is under threat from the growing pandemic. In the initial stages of containment, health services were able to freely distribute Tamiflu as the volume of possible cases remained limited. However, the increased volume of public concern over suspected cases of the virus prompted authorities to move their strategy to the next phase.

Increase in Confirmed and Possible Cases Prompts Shift

15. (SBU) Wellington's Public Health Authorities report that both the increased number of confirmed cases and the volume of public anxiety over suspected cases have stretched its existing medical and human resources. Said Wellington Regional Public Health officer Dr. Stephen Palmer, "[T]he situation is changing rapidly, we are only going to contain [the virus] to a certain extent." Palmer stated that 51 cases have been confirmed in the Wellington region - 16 in the last 48 hours. The Dominion Post reported that one Wellington child is presently in isolation with a confirmed case of the flu, although hospital staff says the symptoms are mild. According to the NZ Ministry of Health, the current number

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of H1N1 cases in NZ are 216 confirmed cases (158 active) and 18 probable cases.

Subsequent H1N1 Threat to Pacific Islands Possible

16. (SBU) Mary Oliver, from the Protocol Division of New Zealand's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT), told post that GNZ does not expect to issue any fresh travel advisories considering the breadth of the pandemic. Oliver did express concern for the spread of H1N1 to islands in the South Pacific which may not have sufficient infrastructure to handle a pandemic outbreak. According to Oliver, this is especially a concern with the coming of the New Zealand and Australian vacation season, with many vacationers choosing to visit these islands.

GNZ Moves to Strengthen Health Services

17. (U) The GNZ also announced that community-based health services throughout NZ were being strengthened to manage increased numbers of people with flu, in addition to support services for patients with other illnesses. In the central North Island city of Rotorua, 11 high school students have been quarantined by health authorities after two classmates tested positive for the H1N1 virus.

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